

Noralv Veggeland

The regional Europe concept

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Summary

There has been talk of a «regional Europe», and the concept has been used without inhibition when it has been a question of describing European development. But, what does the concept really mean? Is it a Europe with regions where regions are state controlled instruments, or a Europe of regions on a level with a Europe of nation-states. Or is the concept both of these things? The different theories concerned with the question can be classified according to whether they are idealistic or realistic/pragmatic. Central to their analyses is the new role played by the national states in a Europe coming closer together, and where the European Union is a supra-national unit. But the European Union is also a supra-regional construction, and this means that the regions must be allocated a position on the European political arena. The shared laws behind the European Union are steadily granting greater legitimacy to regional power. European Commissioners may also seek to by-pass national governments, and deal directly with regions. In consequence, Euro-federalists tend to support an increased role for the Commission and its corollary «A Europe of Regions», while anti-federalists and cynics argue that what is really being proposed is that region authorities should become the agents of Brussels, i.e. «A Europe with Regions».

The Regions form the background for the post-modern position. Postmodernity places a strong emphasis on «difference» and cultural manifold. The manifold in types of community has the effect of strengthening the move towards European regionalisation and the building of regions. Regionalism is strengthened, while state nationalism connected to the modern is weakened. A model for a «regional Europe» is a Europe of and with regions, consisting of functional regions side by side with national actors and other actors. Such a Europe has been called «multi-perspectival», «multi-layered» and «multi-leveled».

Keywords: European regions, the concept of region, participation in the EU.

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About the author

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Preface

The term region relates to a geographical area. It also implies a division of governance between state and local authorities. In this report I outline the concept of region and the driving forces behind the regionalisation process in Europe. The widespread and unrestricted appeal to the regional dimension has led to somewhat lax adoption of the concept of the concept of «Europe of Regions» by the media and some sectors of literature. In the report I present an analysis away from the «Europe of regions», and towards a more

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differentiated appraisal of the realities of the "New Europe". A paper version was presented at the Alpen-Adria-Symposium held in Graz, Austria, in 1997.

Introduction

«Regional Europe» has become a steadily more familiar concept when it comes to describing and analysing the development of Europe. (Veggeland 1994) It has been used quite without inhibition in the description of all types of activity which involve sub-national geographical units. But what is actually described? Does such a Europe exist? Do the regions play a more important role than was the case a decade earlier? Are the national states in the process of abdicating their place to the regions?

Besides, is the question a Europe of Regions or a Europe with Regions? The question concerns different models for «competence» sharing and self-government structures. It is a fundamental question, because it shows that the European regions can have two principally different functions: As realities existing within a constitutionally formed political system based on federal principles. Or, participating in a hierarchical and monopolistic state-controlled political system. In consequence, Euro-federalists tend to support the first concept, while anti-federalists and cynics argue that regional authorities should remain the agents of Brussels and nation-state authorities.

In a Europe of regions, the regions will be real actors with power and exert an influence on development. The European Commissioners should by-pass national governments, and deal directly with the regions. In a Europe with regions on the other hand, the national states will form a partnership with them, and yet retain their dominance and monopolistic position in the different political arenas. In the first case the regional power and influence will constitute what in judicial studies is called a "horizontal order" of laws, rules and institutions. Opsahl (1981) suggests that treaties and agreements made on an institutional base at the regional level can have the effect of decentralising, or constituting a horizontal order, in opposition to national law which creates a vertical order to regulate the hierarchy.

In a Europe with regions, national law will apply in a manner such that the national states will be the main actors and the regions will be participants in a vertical order i.e. a state hierarchy. Regions can correspondingly be political actors in two ways. Either in a social system based on a horizontal order, or in a system based on a vertical order. The one position doesn't exclude the other. One result of the process of decentralisation is that some EU member states now have a constitutionally prescribed federal structure of regional government (such as Germany, Belgium and Austria). Others, like the Scandinavian countries, have a politically prescribed system of regional government, but quite close to a devolved system in which local government is empowered to undertake any task which has not been specially prohibited from undertaking by statute, or which has not been delegated to another council. A third group of national states, including the United Kingdom, has regional government empowered to carry out activities specifically assigned to it by Parliament - all other activities being *ultra vires*. This in contrast to local government elsewhere in Europe, where the «power of general competence» obtains.

A central question is then if a horizontal regional order is compatible with a supra-national European Union, or if the European Union is a territorial extension of the national state's monopolistic role as it furthers the vertical system? As we shall see, the European Union with its institutions is less ambiguous than the national states when it is a matter of emphasising both the horizontal and vertical order. This can be accounted for, as Opsahl (1981) has pointed out by Community Law which the European Union builds upon and which is a new and uniquely specified system of law. Not like International Law, which is basically built on the inter-state level, and not like National Laws which are based upon state authority. It applies not just to states and not just within a state.

Community Law has its origins in the treaties and the sets of rules which it develops from these treaties. Institutional decision making is built upon a uniform system of overarching and subordinate rules, where the treaties are the highest level of judicial authority. According to Opsahl (1981) the important thing here is that the Community doesn't itself possess the authority to extend its own jurisdiction.

An extension thus requires a new treaty between the states or a corresponding authority being granted to the regions. Of the authority which the Community already has, one says readily that the states - and the regions as they with time strengthen their relative autonomy - practice together parts of their sovereignty through their participation in the European Union. Independent decision making is replaced by joint decision making. Put in different terminology, the European Union opens for manifold in the community, a horizontal order together with a vertical one and a Europe both of and with regions.

But a general rule is that treaties and agreements between regions rest on safer ground when the involved states have committed themselves. It appears that one is as unwilling to contemplate a pure Europe of regions as one is interested in a one-dimensional Europe with regions. This is understandable if we take European reality as our starting point. As Susan Borrás-Alomar et al. write in their reflections on regional participation in the European Union:

«Direct regional participation was necessary not only for the detailed knowledge of local conditions which the new 'programme approach' to regional policy demanded, but also - and more importantly in the long-term - in the wider sense of legitimising the Brussels decision-making process which so often is viewed as distant and bureaucratic».

Susan Borrás-Alomar et al (1994: 7)

The nation-state is still the central actor in the European arena. The national state has its origin in a system where regionalisation and the building of regions are developmental tendencies which under cut this origo. The European Union represents not therefore just a supra-national entity, it also represents supra-regionality but from another perspective. It is the last mentioned which is mirrored in the way institutions in the European Union direct their attention towards regionality and nationality.

In this article I will analyse the concept of a «regional Europe» by examining the theories that can be found in the literature on the subject. The existing literature can be divided broadly into two types of response to the question of a regional Europe. In an idealistic direction where the focus is upon a Europe of regions. Or alternatively in a more pragmatic/realistic approach where the focus is upon a Europe both of and with regions. Between both these approaches there arise ideological differences and practical conflicts. At the same time the post-modern dilemma is clearly mirrored when it is confronted by the strength of modernity based upon instrumental rationality. (Habermas 1968)

Manifold community

Already in the 1950's and 60's the concept of regional Europe can be found in the literature. It expresses an idealistic attitude towards the need for a regional Europe and is identified with the development of cultural manifold, identity, civility and a post-modern Europe. (Harvey 1989)

Some, such as Leopold Kohr (1957), were sceptical to the idea of a supra-national federation and a united Europe where questions of security and peace would be of the utmost importance. He argued that a regional Europe was preferable because the cause of war lay principally in the concentration of power to be found in national states. The greater the power and size of the national state, the greater the risk of conflicts with destructive effects. Kohr interprets Europe's political history from such a perspective and finds support for his general belief that «small is beautiful» in a post-modern sense. He therefore visualises sub-national entities, regions capable of preserving peace.

A perspective to be strongly opposed later was proposed by the sociologist Ralph Dahrendorf (1991), who feared precisely just such an erosion of the national states. He asserted that in post-war Europe it was in fact the national states after the Second World War who had guaranteed a peaceful development: involved and regulated interaction was based upon conventions, agreements and the will to maintain a peaceful state of affairs. In this connection, he puts regions onto the agenda by talking of «the tribes of Europe». The reasoning is connected to Europe's complex ethnicity, and the fact that there aren't conventions and agreements to regulate the relations between regions as is the case with the national states.

A second idealistic approach can be found in political philosophers such as Denis de Rougemont (1983) and Guy Heraud (1968). Civility is seen to represent the foundation for civil society and it provides the basis for the identity which occupies the population. Here, regionality and postmodernity are seen to play an essential role. Denis de Rougemont's civil orientation is mirrored in his emphasis on building up the regional dimension as a way of re-establishing the local society; such that the individual can find the civic dimension without which she/he is not a real person (de Rougemont 1983)

Civility must be exercised within a concretely, existing framework. Civil actions in public arenas, devolution, must take place within a given geographical area, which has been agreed upon in a consensual manner. To use a turn of phrase, the large must take place in the small and the small within the large. This is obviously what Denis de Rougemont does when he connects civility and the region together:

«...the space for civic participation in which man comes alive to the world and to himself at the same time».

Christopher Harvie believes that such a definition of the concept region connected to one of civility makes both concepts unnecessarily abstract. He makes the same criticism against the sociologist Giddens: "For the sociologist Anthony Giddens, the concept (regions of Europe) has also this fundamental quality, being a foyer for social action extending from the family dwelling to the nation-state" (Harvie 1994: 6). Such a wide definition of the concept region reduces its conceptual clarity, and makes it uncommonly lacking in operationality. The concept civility becomes also unclear.

The concept civility is connected with citizens in society and their activity in social arenas. The adjective civil means bourgeois; to go without uniform. Civility means correspondingly bourgeois activity which isn't a result of a given position in the established organisational and administrative system of society. Civil actions are not a part of the bureaucracy. Civility has its basis in initiatives taken by citizens in society which lead to actions and results. The concept reflects participation and co-operation. Sometimes in harmony with the boundaries laid down by the establishment and in accordance with their accepted forms of action, at other times in sharp conflict with them. For Harvey (1994) the civil society is the post-modern society which bases itself on regionality, from the local society to regions of differing geographical size, and then further to the national state. At issue is the manifold of community forms on different levels. But the concept civility is connected to the public space, and not to the private sphere of the family as is the case of Giddens. Actions are to be functional in a space where the individual and groups are able to exert control over the public sphere. A region represents such a space. Regionality becomes indicative of a civilised society.

This means that a civilised and strong state cannot exist over time without a developed regional society. With a lack of regionality it is only a question of time before society collapses. It was precisely this which marked the destiny of totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and many others. However, the western democracies are also faced by the need to maintain regionality, and therewith civility. Society requiring it for the dynamism and legitimacy considered necessary for stabile development.

Guy Heraud (1968) in his own way arrives at the same conclusions when it comes to sub-national units, the regions in European development. This political author finds three possible alternative models: «A federation of historical regions, a federation of economic regions, and a federation of ethnic regions» (Heraud 1968: 70-78). These coincide with what I have in several texts called functional and historical/cultural regions (Veggeland, 1992, 1994). Heraud doesn't consider the economic region because it doesn't give the individual any feeling of identity, one of the main goals of building regions in Europe. He therefore draws the conclusion that the region based on ethnicity represents the optimal political structure, and the basis of a Europe of regions.

The theories above describe a Europe of regions in a decentralised federation where the nation-state is abolished. The idealistic standpoint is of a manifold in community. But how practical is such a community? How practical is the post-modern position?

Postmodernism or modernism

Post-structuralism and postmodernism with its deconstruction and refusal of the modern, is interesting for the better understanding they provide of contemporary theories of a regional Europe and manifold in community. The collapse of universal ideologies, utopias and logical conceptual systems, because they don't correspond with reality, has led postmodernists to reject them. (Flyvbjerg 1992) This is also what the idealistic literature does when it argues for a Europe of regions. It refuses national-statism as a foundation to build upon and connects this «ism» to modernity's system thinking. Instead of the appeal to «grand narratives» one looks «the small narratives», to be found in the local and regional, with a basis in many lifestyles, forms of life and cultures. Postmodernists argue that it is this manifold which is reality, and it therefore forms the building blocks of the European house.

By way of contrast let us turn to modernity and its perception of the foundation of modern society. Modernity's starting point is the optimistic belief in rationality and enlightenment.

In the Enlightenment at the close of the eighteenth century, the European foundation for the development of the modern society was laid as state powers were formed. They based their legitimacy upon nationalism and a monopoly of culture. The national state's ideological assumptions were precisely this optimistic belief in rationality and enlightenment.

The construction of national states

The political scientist Stein Rokkan (1987) introduces three phases in his account of the development of the western national state over the last two centuries. The phases are at the same time placed in the context of the development of modernity.

The first phase involves state formation. It is characterised by the consolidation of a central political power as it attempts to monopolise the right to use power within its own territorial boundaries. Political co-ordination, increased centralisation, recognition of state sovereignty in relation to other powers, the extension of state authority as it reaches across the territory with effective physical control, taxation and lines of communication - these are typical traits associated with this phase. (Hagtvedt 1987)

The second phase involves the building of nations. Nation building for Rokkan is characterised first and foremost by the formation of a national language and a set of cultural standards, the clarification of the state's conventional bonds and the motivation of the population towards action through the gradual widening of their civil rights, "citizenship". Nation building lays the foundation for its own political legitimacy: people's belief in the ruling system's right to rule. Or, as Hagtvedt (1987: 8-9) expresses it:

«In other words, for Rokkan the building of nations is a strategy used by the central elites to strengthen the bond between the territorial power of the state and its subjects. Such a thorough going control of a national territory leads to a rationalisation of political authority: local identity is weakened, and people are joined to the national community not merely by the universal right to participate, but also by the building up of a shared cultural identity. The state belongs to the sphere of power, the nation to the sphere of culture».

The ideology providing legitimacy is seen to be nationalism. Between central and the part-cultures of the regions there has always been a deep conflict. This has been expressed among other things in the conflict between a decentralised horizontal order and a centralised vertical order.

The last phase Rokkan identifies is that of class conflict. It is intimately connected with industrialisation and the growth of social segments in the labour market and in other markets. But the lines of conflict are not one-dimensional. They can go between national elites, over people's identity (ideological conflicts), between interest groups (functional conflicts), and between the centre and the periphery (territorial conflicts) (Hagtvedt 1987).

Preconditions for nation-state building

English philosophy, as embodied in the work of John Locke (1632-1704) in particular led to a strong belief in reason, rationality and logical conceptual systems. A dichotomy was made between that which is and that which ought to be. That which is, is expressed in instrumental rationalism, and this in turn provided the foundation for the development of scientific knowledge i.e. comprehensive systems and hierarchies. Statements with the term ought on the other hand, referred to unscientific value rationalism characterised by a manifold of meanings and attitudes.

Instrumental rationalism's conceptual systems were the precondition for the development of a modern society based upon three functions:

The ideological perspective

The rationalistic conceptual system was able to function as a set of universal ideologies and utopias; these were holistic and consistent in their perception of reality and provided the legitimation and direction for collective actions taking place in the social arena. They were sharpened points with which to pierce traditional and metaphysical "superstitions"; able to transform each aspect of the traditional into the modern. National-statism is a real child of instrumental rationality, with its monopolistic ideology and suppression of cultural minorities.

The technological perspective

The rationalistic conceptual system was able to function as a natural scientific theory, which in a totally new way presented mankind with the chance of developing techniques and technologies to control natural forces.

The state and its hierarchical bureaucracy were regarded as a value-free instrument giving people power and control over the complex machinery of society. (Weber 1971)

The political perspective

The rationalistic conceptual system was able to function as a social scientific theory capable of providing the possibility of developing a social technology, where planned action was based upon knowledge of lines of causality. Science and rational planning were the most important tools for developing and maintaining modernity and the national state.

The clearest critique in this connection has been made by the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1968). In particular, he identifies three social forms which are the direct consequence of the belief in the instrumental rationality, and he believes they characterise modernity up to the present day.

To begin with the belief in rationality connected to the construction of large power and system-based ideologies such as nationalism, liberalism, capitalism, Marxism, Communism and Nazism. These "isms" have all been cultivated in their pure states and practised politically, with as we know, catastrophic consequences. They were developed as products in the belief in total rationalism, but ended up as completely irrational, both in ideology and in practice.

Secondly, they were connected with bourgeois and nationalistic demands for national state sovereignty. A sovereignty based upon military power, power of the state, of the market and a cultural monopoly i.e. a state top/down hegemony in all areas.

Thirdly, rationality was unequivocally connected with technical or instrumental rationality. «Technique and science became ideology», as Habermas (1968) expressed it, an ideology legitimating in a one-dimensional way a technological and instrumental theory capable of dominating nature and society. Rational planning became a social activity imagining that if the causal relations were known, then reality could be manipulated to achieve a favourable result. The state became rationalism's highest form of political expression.

Difference

Modernity and rationality understood in this way are what postmodernism has turned against in a declaration of the total dismissal of the modern. It lies behind the main social philosophical thesis: the collapse «of the grand narratives» and the rise of a manifold in community.

The thesis expresses in other words, how the large system theories, the ideologies and utopias of progress and emancipation, creating the foundation for social, political and cultural practice within the framework of the national state, have fallen from grace. We can add that their primary function has been to provide legitimization for institutions: political systems reproducing inequality and lack of freedom, power for some and impotence for others.

Instead the post-modern proposes the principle of sustainable «difference». Its position is that society consists fundamentally of an integrating manifold, of different forms of life, cultures, forms of understanding, language games, which can't or shouldn't ever be made into any uniform consensus, based on a higher spirit to use Friedrich G. W. Hegel's (1770-1831) terminology (see for example Lyotard, 1986; Harvey 1989). The alternative is precisely manifold in community.

As in nature's ecology, manifold and difference form the value and precondition for life living and regulating itself in forms of balance. Modernity's invasion of the socio-cultural manifold upsets inexorably the human ecological balance, with as we are only far too aware, large local and global environmental problems following in its wake.

Fragmentation – the post-modern dilemma

One can choose to give the critical potential a focus. In our context this will lie in the following: regionalism, in the "small narratives", in the power to act represented by the bottom/up perspective on conflicts of interest. (Simonsen, 1991) The geographer and postmodernist David Harvey (1989) emphasises that the interval between the decay of the old and the formation and establishment of the new, constitutes a period of transition, which always necessarily will be one of uncertainty, confusion, error and wild and fierce «fanaticism». But a number of questions remain: how will it be possible to implement the large common

decisions which a European entity is also dependent on? How can human rights be safe-guarded? How can greater social justice be achieved between social groups, countries and regions? How can the global eco-systems be saved?

In opposition to the postmodernists Habermas (1981) maintains that modernity, with its rationalism, even if incomplete, is a promising and necessary project. But it is necessary to distinguish between instrumental and communicative rationality, between instrumental and communicative actions. Habermas asserts that it isn't rationality that there is something wrong with as such, but instrumental rationality's totalising ideology and function in practice. He doesn't therefore reject instrumental rationality when it is directed towards the realisation of concrete projects, and he acknowledges in principle overarching institutional systems in society capable of ensuring collective action.

It is at this point that he inserts his critique. Technological rationality is seen to be lacking. It must be supplemented with value rationalism and communicative actions, with enlightenment, with social mobilisation, with dialogue - with regionality - as the way to bring about acts of an involved and emancipatory character.

In different language, but nevertheless still relatable to the discussion on the concept of a regional Europe, Habermas says that planning for such a Europe is not just a project, but also a discussion of goals, joint participation and processes. Communicative actions must therefore find their place in the manifold of cultures, language games and forms of life making up our society (Habermas 1968). On this count he shares a common platform with the postmodernists.

But the difference is that Habermas regards in addition modernity as a foundation for shared actions and the carrying out of larger projects, when they are desirable. Habermas fears impotence in the postmodernist's theoretical position.

Irrespective of theoretical position there exists a political dilemma in the debate and it refers to questions concerning the foundation of democracy: how is power and influence to be divided between nations, regions, institutions, organisations and citizens? In relation to the question of a regional Europe, Habermas would assert that a Europe of regions must be supplemented by a Europe with participating regions, where participation by the regions in the hierarchy is based upon instrumental rationalism.

The pragmatic approach to political participation as a goal

In similar vein to Habermas's criticism of the one-sidedness of postmodernism, there developed in the course of the 1980s a number of analyses of the concept regional Europe, where the concern was to be more realistic/pragmatic. The pragmatic literature suggests that the goal for regional participation is to be found in the decision making process, access to own means to create regional development and the formation of regional partnerships to strengthen a region's status when based upon community and relative autonomy.

This shift can also be seen as an answer to the large changes which have taken place in political and economic structures. The idealistic analysis is still to be found. But the European Union system has itself developed and created new preconditions for power and influence. Regions became involved as real participants in both the "horizontal and vertical order" of agreements and decision making arenas. It is possible to say that the regions were re-created, given relative autonomy, and access to the means necessary to develop their own territory. These events indicated that a regional Europe really was being developed.

Susana Borrás-Alomar et al. (1994: 8) write the following in their interesting article, «Towards a Europe of Regions? Visions and Reality from a Critical Perspective»:

«For the Commission this meant accessing regional/local expertise in the formation of Community policies while at the same time aligning regional interest with Commission rather than national governments or other Community institutions. For regional actors, it was a limited but important way of beginning to respond to the overwhelming presence of national governments in the pre-proposal stage of Commission working groups, steering and management committees - the world of 'comitology'».

The same authors place an emphasis on the fact that since the 1980's we have been witness to a European complex developing new preconditions for the election of regional authorities as participants in the European arena. In the same article (1994: 5) they write:

«In Western Europe political decentralisation, regional economic development and interregional co-operation have seen an extraordinary increase during the 1980s and 1990s. These developments, related to the intensification of European integration, have stimulated new perceptions, expectations and political interests at subnational levels of government».

But they add that the regional influence in the European Union is still far from balanced. Reality is such that there is substantial gap between European outputs towards the regions, and regional inputs into the Community systems. (1994) Besides, it is not the case that all regions have the same influence and access to the spheres of power within the European Union. There is a great difference between Catalan and the strength of the German regions when it comes to the power game played out in the European Union, as between North Jutland and Friesland for example.

A new understanding of the regional dimension results from the awareness cited in the quotation, where regional activity in the European arena is seen to be increasing. It is this understanding which characterises a more pragmatic attitude to European regionalisation and region building.

Christopher Harvie (1994) belongs to the pragmatic tradition of observers. He argues for the increased prominence of the region as the most suitable building block for European development and points out that taken in the more strictly political sense of the field of action of hegemonic groups, the region or the city-region has a far longer track record than the nation. Europe was dominated for over five centuries by city-states - the Hanse, Venice, Amsterdam - against a century and half by nation states. But his region concept comprises also «new regions» as an expression of desentralisation of political power and of regionalised economic development (Harvie 1994: 55-57).

Susana Borrás-Alomar et al. (1994: 5) are quite explicit in their belief that a wave of pragmatism is rolling across Europe when it comes to the role of regions.

«The pragmatic sense of the regional political elites and policy makers is based on two basic attitudes. Firstly, there is (implicit or explicit) acceptance of the enduring nature of nationstates, rather than questioning them. Secondly, the regional governments' strategies vis-à-vis the new developments of the European integration process is focused on claims about a greater institutional presence in European Union decisions (for example, the claims about the establishment of a Committee of the Regions in the Maastricht Treaty) and by the effective setting up of specific initiatives such as interregional co-operation agreements and regional representation offices in Brussels».

The pragmatic understanding of European regionalisation involves building a Europe with and of regions. Such a conclusion has explanatory value in the degree to which the focus is upon regionalisation within the framework of the European Union. It clarifies the concept «regional Europe», since this concept also includes the idealistic approach interested in civility and identity, a Europe of regions. It is therefore understandable why regional Europe is a clear concept within the pragmatic tradition.

A model for a regional Europe

The regions in Europe can be classified according to three types: (1) administrative regions, (2) cultural/ethnic regions, and (3) functional regions. (Veggeland 1994)

The administrative regions are a part of the state hierarchy and function on the basis of what we have called the vertical order. The administrative regions receive their juridical authority from the State, which also decides their administrative structure and the areas over which this authority extends.

The State can delegate responsibility and rights to its administrative regions, it can also de-regulate areas in the administrative system, but it will always retain the possibility of withdrawing this delegation if there arise disagreements in the hierarchy. The administrative regions are in the final analysis answerable to the state. The development of these types of regions has been closely connected to the development of the national state, presenting the state with a way of regionalising its power and authority. Through the hierarchy the expression of culture has been standardised, and local and regional cultural minorities have been oppressed. (Barth Eide and Neuman 1994)

The cultural/ethnic regions in Europe are created by historical events. Homogeneity and the experience of shared identity characterise citizens of these regions. They have been exposed to political and cultural suppression by the larger society, the power of the state. But the cultural/ethnic regions have never submitted to the national state's attempt to standardise their culture, and, domination of their territory has never been completely successful.

Therefore, the cultural/ethnic regions continue to exist in European space, and postmodernity with its emphasis on «difference» has in many ways rehabilitated their existence. But, they continue to function unequally in respect to national statism. This is not the case if they geographically more or less accidentally coincide with the representation of an administrative region. Examples of such can be found on the European arena. The autonomous region of Catalan can be mentioned. But such a coincidence is far from the norm. Normally the cultural/ethnic regions reach over boundaries i.e. folk groups with a shared history and culture live on both sides of administrative regions or national boundaries. (Hylland Eriksen 1993) They demand a federal structure and that boundaries be dismantled, and that what we have called a «Europe of regions» is constructed.

The functional regions are connected to an area of co-operation where a territorial regime has the responsibility of regulation. They represent potential «economic zones of attraction». Co-operation can involve the development of infra-structure, business enterprises, tourism, the labour market, the environment, culture and so on. Based on such activities the functional regions don't have to follow the administrative boundaries, either regional or national. Inter-regional co-operation can thus take place between administrative regions in a national state or on trans-national level. This means that administrative boundaries don't necessarily have to be followed, it is functional considerations which count, consideration of such don't usually follow such boundaries.

The functional regions can be either vertically or horizontally organised, or both. This means that co-operation and agreements can take different forms. The vertical functional regions are limited to urban hierarchies, city agglomerations, with one or more centres and a periphery. They can represent a labour market, an integrated business sector, an integrated infra-structure, or an eco-system which needs to be regulated and protected.

The horizontal regions are geographically delimited independently of place hierarchies. The horizontal order is based on regimes which organise the activity within the region. The areas of co-operation can be the same as for the vertically integrated functional regions, but the centre-periphery dynamic is of less importance. (Veggeland 1994a) What counts is the value mutually beneficial co-operation can have for the involved territorial partners.

In contra-distinction to Guy Heraud (1968), who asserts that a model for the regions based upon functional regions does not account for the spiritual and cultural order in Europe, an essential goal of a European federation, I would argue the opposite. Functional regions integrate both the cultural/ethnic regions (as Heraud argues) and the administrative regions. From a historical point of view the cultural/ethnic region is a functional region. The same applies to the administrative region with its position in the state hierarchy. But the functional regions would like to be regions with and of regions, and not to be hindered by the boundaries laid down by the national state (Veggeland 1996). They wish to base themselves on both the horizontal and vertical order, being able to function both on an inter-state and inter-regional level. They can also function trans-stately and trans-regionally i.e. co-operation can develop across boundaries and across the authority of hierarchies. (Keohane 1977) This means that manifold in cultures, forms of co-operation and regimes are able to function together.

A Europe of functional regions fits the European Union's pragmatic interpretation of the concept regional Europe, as it has been described above. Susan Borrás-Alomar et al. (1994: 24) are correct when they conclude with the following:

«The place of regions in Europe is alongside that of national and non-state actors. They are not, any more, mere statistical units or the sub-ordinates of central governments, but neither are they anywhere near to replace the state. It is this recognition that ought to guide the political discourse as well as academic analysis away from the 'Europe of the Regions', and towards a more differentiated appraisal of the realities of the 'New Europe'».

A pragmatic model for a regional Europe is a Europe consisting of a manifold of and with functional regions. Such a Europe will be «multi-perspectival», «multi-layered» and «multi-levelled». (Borrás-Alomar et al. 1994: 24)

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